

The Greasers Subculture: Background

WHY?

I chose the Greasers subculture simply because I love the 1950's era. The whole era itself was so influential for the United States. From rock and roll to Marilyn Monroe, the 1950's was the pivotal decade for the emergence of many pop culture celebrities and icons that are still prevalent in today's society.



The typical "greaser look" can be seen in this photo with the hairstyle and leather jacket. This image was found using Google Images.

HISTORY

Greasers were a youth subculture that originated in the 1950's among teenagers in northeastern and southern United States. The two main figures of the look were Marlon Brando and James Dean.

When the teens in the 1950's and 1960's adopted the name "Greaser," they did so with the idea of being rebellious. The greasers were young white men that needed to rebel and they did so with their look and attitude.

In the northeast and southern states, the Greasers were one of the first types of street gangs. These greaser gangs existed before gangs were dependent on violence and drugs. The greasers of the 1950's took their name from the "Greaser Act," which was a law created in California against Mexicans to protect Californians from Mexicans who were unarmed, but not peaceful or quiet people. The name "Greaser" was given to the Mexicans that greased carts in the mid-1800's. This job was one of the worst jobs that anyone could have, which made the name "Greaser" one of utmost disrespect.

MATERIAL CULTURE

Aside from the Beatniks, the Greasers were the other major group known for their distinguished fashions. As portrayed in the novel, *The Outsiders*, the real-life Greasers were distinguishable by the way they would slick their hair back by using various combinations of at-home hair creams and gels, leather jackets and various styles of boots. Rock and roll was also a major part of the subculture. They are typically pictured with cigarettes in their mouth and their shiny pompadour hairstyles, while riding motorcycles or fast cars. The Greasers were the rebels who typically went for the "bad boy" look.

They hung out in their "hoods," which also gave them the name, "hoods." The name "greaser" also came from their greased-back hairstyle, which involved combing back the hair using hair wax, hair gel, creams, tonics, or pomade.

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Fashion:

- >Fitted T-shirts with the sleeves rolled up
- >Ringer T-shirts
- >Leather/denim jackets
- >Black or blue jeans with rolled up cuffs
- >Motorcycle or army boots
- >Chuck Taylor All-Stars
- >Bandannas, chain wallets, black leather gloves, fedoras

NON-MATERIAL CULTURE

The Greasers valued their looks and their "bad boy" image. They sought to be the "rebels without a cause" who acted out to simply escape boredom. After the war, American youths were looking for entertainment and identity following the war-hero image from World War II generation. The subculture also featured deviant social behavior influenced by the way films portrayed greasers. While the Greasers tried to rebel against societal norms, they created their own norm in doing so. Some folkways they practiced include acting tough in public, greasing their hair, and give a thumbs up instead of waving while walking down the street. Avoiding fights with fellow Greasers, taking another Greasers' woman, and the infamous leather jacket are some of the mores the Greasers practiced. The folkways include hanging out with people outside of their group, betraying one another, and getting kicked out of their gang were some of their taboos. *Bopping*, *down kiddie*, and *punk out* are a few examples of common slang. The most iconic symbol for Greasers is the leather jacket, but the hairstyles and rebellious behavior are other defining symbols.



Another example of a typical Greaser from the 1950's. This image was found on Wikipedia.

SUMMARY

The Greasers wanted to stand out as "different" in society. They refused to submit themselves to society's beliefs of ethical

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behavior just to be accepted. Even though they were stereotyped as reckless, dangerous, and rebellious juveniles, they were often neglected and misunderstood youths. They originally arose from white working-class families that didn't have access to the greatest educational resources or life opportunities, which led to most of them getting involved with criminal activity. During the 1950's, women also became a part of greaser culture and were called "Greaser girls." Like men, they joined motorcycle gangs and wore jackets displaying their group's or gang's name. Latina women involved in gangs typically did not fight side-by-side with male gangs, but they did fight rival female gangs in the 1950's. Women were often depicted as the property of male motorcycle gang members.